**The Pride of the Cities**

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Said Mr. Kipling, “The cities are full of pride, challenging each to each.” Even so.

New York was empty. Two hundred thousand of its people were away for the summer. Three million eight hundred thousand remained as caretakers and to pay the bills of the absentees. But the two hundred thousand are an expensive lot.

The New Yorker sat at a roof-garden table, ingesting solace through a straw. His panama lay upon a chair. The July audience was scattered among vacant seats as widely as outfielders when the champion batter steps to the plate. Vaudeville happened at intervals. The breeze was cool from the bay; around and above—everywhere except on the stage—were stars. Glimpses were to be had of waiters, always disappearing, like startled chamois. Prudent visitors who had ordered refreshments by ‘phone in the morning were now being served. The New Yorker was aware of certain drawbacks to his comfort, but content beamed softly from his rimless eyeglasses. His family was out of town. The drinks were warm; the ballet was suffering from lack of both tune and talcum—but his family would not return until September.

Then up into the garden stumbled the man from Topaz City, Nevada. The gloom of the solitary sightseer enwrapped him. Bereft of joy through loneliness, he stalked with a widower’s face through the halls of pleasure. Thirst for human companionship possessed him as he panted in the metropolitan draught. Straight to the New Yorker’s table he steered.

The New Yorker, disarmed and made reckless by the lawless atmosphere of a roof garden, decided upon utter abandonment of his life’s traditions. He resolved to shatter with one rash, dare-devil, impulsive, hair-brained act the conventions that had hitherto been woven into his existence. Carrying out this radical and precipitous inspiration he nodded slightly to the stranger as he drew nearer the table.

The next moment found the man from Topaz City in the list of the New Yorker’s closest friends. He took a chair at the table, he gathered two others for his feet, he tossed his broad-brimmed hat upon a fourth, and told his life’s history to his new-found pard.

The New Yorker warmed a little, as an apartment-house furnace warms when the strawberry season begins. A waiter who came within hail in an unguarded moment was captured and paroled on an errand to the Doctor Wiley experimental station. The ballet was now in the midst of a musical vagary, and danced upon the stage programmed as Bolivian peasants, clothed in some portions of its anatomy as Norwegian fisher maidens, in others as ladies-in-waiting of Marie Antoinette, historically denuded in other portions so as to represent sea nymphs, and presenting the *to* *ut en* *sem* *b* *le* of a social club of Central Park West housemaids at a fish fry.

“Been in the city long?” inquired the New Yorker, getting ready the exact tip against the waiter’s coming with large change from the bill.

“Me?” said the man from Topaz City. “Four days. Never in Topaz City, was you?”

“I!” said the New Yorker. “I was never farther west than Eighth Avenue. I had a brother who died on Ninth, but I met the cortege at Eighth. There was a bunch of violets on the hearse, and the undertaker mentioned the incident to avoid mistake. I cannot say that I am familiar with the West.”

“Topaz City,” said the man who occupied four chairs, “is one of the finest towns in the world.”

“I presume that you have seen the sights of the metropolis,” said the New Yorker, “Four days is not a sufficient length of time in which to view even our most salient points of interest, but one can possibly form a general impression. Our architectural supremacy is what generally strikes visitors to our city most forcibly. Of course you have seen our Flatiron Building. It is considered—”

“Saw it,” said the man from Topaz City. “But you ought to come out our way. It’s mountainous, you know, and the ladies all wear short skirts for climbing and—”

“Excuse me,” said the New Yorker, “but that isn’t exactly the point. New York must be a wonderful revelation to a visitor from the West. Now, as to our hotels—”

“Say,” said the man from Topaz City, “that reminds me—there were sixteen stage robbers shot last year within twenty miles of—”

“I was speaking of hotels,” said the New Yorker. “We lead Europe in that respect. And as far as our leisure class is concerned we are far—”

“Oh, I don’t know,” interrupted the man from Topaz City. “There were twelve tramps in our jail when I left home. I guess New York isn’t so—”

“Beg pardon, you seem to misapprehend the idea. Of course, you visited the Stock Exchange and Wall Street, where the—”

“Oh, yes,” said the man from Topaz City, as he lighted a Pennsylvania stogie, “and I want to tell you that we’ve got the finest town marshal west of the Rockies. Bill Rainer he took in five pickpockets out of the crowd when Red Nose Thompson laid the cornerstone of his new saloon. Topaz City don’t allow—”

“Have another Rhine wine and seltzer,” suggested the New Yorker. “I’ve never been West, as I said; but there can’t be any place out there to compare with New York. As to the claims of Chicago I—”

“One man,” said the Topazite—“one man only has been murdered and robbed in Topaz City in the last three—”

“Oh, I know what Chicago is,” interposed the New Yorker. “Have you been up Fifth Avenue to see the magnificent residences of our mil—”

“Seen ’em all. You ought to know Reub Stegall, the assessor of Topaz. When old man Tilbury, that owns the only two-story house in town, tried to swear his taxes from $6,000 down to $450.75, Reub buckled on his forty-five and went down to see—”

“Yes, yes, but speaking of our great city—one of its greatest features is our superb police department. There is no body of men in the world that can equal it for—”

“That waiter gets around like a Langley flying machine,” remarked the man from Topaz City, thirstily. “We’ve got men in our town, too, worth $400,000. There’s old Bill Withers and Colonel Metcalf and—”

“Have you seen Broadway at night?” asked the New Yorker, courteously. “There are few streets in the world that can compare with it. When the electrics are shining and the pavements are alive with two hurrying streams of elegantly clothed men and beautiful women attired in the costliest costumes that wind in and out in a close maze of expensively—”

“Never knew but one case in Topaz City,” said the man from the West. “Jim Bailey, our mayor, had his watch and chain and $235 in cash taken from his pocket while—”

“That’s another matter,” said the New Yorker. “While you are in our city you should avail yourself of every opportunity to see its wonders. Our rapid transit system—”

“If you was out in Topaz,” broke in the man from there, “I could show you a whole cemetery full of people that got killed accidentally. Talking about mangling folks up! why, when Berry Rogers turned loose that old double-barrelled shot-gun of his loaded with slugs at anybody—”

“Here, waiter!” called the New Yorker. “Two more of the same. It is acknowledged by every one that our city is the centre of art, and literature, and learning. Take, for instance, our after-dinner speakers. Where else in the country would you find such wit and eloquence as emanate from Depew and Ford, and—”

“If you take the papers,” interrupted the Westerner, “you must have read of Pete Webster’s daughter. The Websters live two blocks north of the court-house in Topaz City. Miss Tillie Webster, she slept forty days and nights without waking up. The doctors said that—”

“Pass the matches, please,” said the New Yorker. “Have you observed the expedition with which new buildings are being run up in New York? Improved inventions in steel framework and—”

“I noticed,” said the Nevadian, “that the statistics of Topaz City showed only one carpenter crushed by falling timbers last year and he was caught in a cyclone.”

“They abuse our sky line,” continued the New Yorker, “and it is likely that we are not yet artistic in the construction of our buildings. But I can safely assert that we lead in pictorial and decorative art. In some of our houses can be found masterpieces in the way of paintings and sculpture. One who has the entree to our best galleries will find—”

“Back up,” exclaimed the man from Topaz City. “There was a game last month in our town in which $90,000 changed hands on a pair of—”

“Ta-romt-tara!” went the orchestra. The stage curtain, blushing pink at the name “Asbestos” inscribed upon it, came down with a slow midsummer movement. The audience trickled leisurely down the elevator and stairs.

On the sidewalk below, the New Yorker and the man from Topaz City shook hands with alcoholic gravity. The elevated crashed raucously, surface cars hummed and clanged, cabmen swore, newsboys shrieked, wheels clattered ear-piercingly. The New Yorker conceived a happy thought, with which he aspired to clinch the pre-eminence of his city.

“You must admit,” said he, “that in the way of noise New York is far ahead of any other—”

“Back to the everglades!” said the man from Topaz City. “In 1900, when Sousa’s band and the repeating candidate were in our town you couldn’t—”

The rattle of an express wagon drowned the rest of the words.